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The role of the Economic and Social Council in the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report analyses how the Economic and Social Council, building on the work of the General Assembly ad hoc working group, can promote an integrated approach to the follow-up and implementation of the outcomes of recent major United Nations conferences and summits. It contains suggestions on how the Council can fully use its segments to sustain progress towards internationally agreed goals and to address policy, coordination and operational aspects of common conference themes. Better preparations for the Council's work, engaging the United Nations system and other actors more broadly may help to strengthen its impact on the implementation of conference outcomes. The report also contains suggestions on how the Council can perform its functions in the follow-up to a number of recent conferences and summits. A number of proposals are put forward for enhancing the Council's dialogue and oversight of the boards of funds and programmes, improving further the contribution of functional commissions to conference implementation and developing the role of regional commissions in reviewing and supporting progress towards achieving the internationally agreed goals. The report also looks at ways to build a closer relationship with the specialized agencies and to foster partnerships and alliances with all stakeholders.

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** The present report was submitted three days after the submission deadline so that the outcome of the eleventh session of the Commission for Sustainable Development and the continuing work of the General Assembly working group on the integrated and coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields could be taken into account.

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I. Introduction

1. The 2003 coordination segment is an occasion for the Economic and Social Council to build on the outcome of the General Assembly ad hoc working group on integrated and coordinated follow-up to conferences and to help contribute to the realization of the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

2. The Council has made some progress, particularly since 1995, in facilitating integrated and coordinated follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits through consideration of cross-sectoral themes, enhanced interaction with other intergovernmental bodies, United Nations system organizations and relevant stakeholders and through the introduction of improvements in its working methods. Greater focus now needs to be given to seeking ways to maximize its impact on implementation and better engage national level actors and constituents.

3. Although the present report is being issued before the General Assembly working group on the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields completes its work, it should be read in conjunction with the outcome of the work of that group. The key recommendations of the working group that pertain to the Economic and Social Council will be made available to the Council.

II. Integrated and coordinated implementation

Role of the Economic and Social Council in the follow-up to internationally agreed goals

4. The Millennium Declaration and the outcomes of other major United Nations conferences and summits have outlined a comprehensive vision of development. The Economic and Social Council, as one of the bodies established under the Charter of the United Nations, with key responsibilities for economic and social development, must ensure that its work is oriented towards support for the implementation of conference outcomes, that is, to make their vision a reality.

5. The United Nations role in the economic, social and related areas gained renewed relevance with the major conferences and summits held since the 1990s. It is important to capture their inclusive spirit and visibility in the United Nations intergovernmental bodies, so as to keep the momentum created by these events. It is also important that United Nations intergovernmental bodies gear themselves to an "implementation mode" and work in a coherent way to support conference implementation. The Council is at the core of the response to these challenges.

6. The role of the Economic and Social Council is multifaceted, involving debates on major social and economic policy issues at its high-level segments. As the central mechanism for coordination of the United Nations system, it has a specific responsibility for system-wide coordination and for supporting an integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up to conference outcomes. At its 57th session, the General Assembly once again recognized the Council's role in this regard.[1] The Council has also been assigned specific responsibilities for the follow-

up to individual conferences and summits. These include, under different arrangements which involve different levels of consideration within the Council and its subsidiary machinery, the Third United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries, the International Conference on Financing for Development, the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. Furthermore, the Council provides overall guidance and coordination to the funds and programmes and to the operational work of the system at the country level, a role which should also be progressively geared towards advancing the integrated implementation of conference outcomes.

7. Through each of these tasks, the Economic and Social Council complements the work of the General Assembly, which is the highest intergovernmental mechanism for policy formulation and appraisal on conference follow-up.

8. Since 1995, the Council has promoted an integrated approach to conference follow-up by focusing on common themes of conferences at its coordination segment, an approach which has been endorsed by the General Assembly.[2] Enhancing further the Council's thematic approach and extending it to other segments may help to make its contribution to the integrated follow-up to conferences and to the Millennium Development Goals more visible and incisive.

9. In this connection, it is useful to recall that the General Assembly decided that the review process of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals will be considered within the framework of the integrated and coordinated follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields.[3] The Council, for its part, has affirmed its commitment to assist the Assembly in its overall responsibilities in follow-up to the Millennium Declaration.[4] In 2002, it reiterated that, while each United Nations conference has its thematic unity, major United Nations conferences and summits should be viewed as interlinked, all contributing to an integrated framework for the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration.[5]

A. Ensuring an integrated approach through thematic reviews

1. High-level segment

10. At its high-level segment, the Economic and Social Council plays an important role in providing political impetus for building areas of convergence,[6] supporting and supplementing the policy development role of the General Assembly. The segment aims to address major topical themes related to economic and social policy as well as international cooperation in the economic, social and related fields. Over the years, it has addressed common themes of conferences (most recently human resources development) and cutting edge issues such as information and communications technology. The Council has effectively demonstrated its ability to engage high-level policy makers, the United Nations system and other actors.

11. The Council's one-day policy dialogue with heads of financial and trade institutions has a distinct role in comparison to the spring meeting of the Council with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The spring meeting, as reconstituted after the International Conference on Financing for Development held at Monterrey, Mexico,[7] is the occasion for intergovernmental

dialogue, not only with the Bretton Woods institutions, but also WTO, focused on coherence, coordination and cooperation in implementing the broad agenda agreed upon at Monterrey. The one-day policy dialogue is the occasion for the Secretary-General and the heads of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and WTO to discuss important developments in the world economy and international development cooperation, providing a significant opportunity to discuss the impact of the world economic situation on the realization of internationally agreed development goals. Focusing the one-day policy dialogue on these issues would also enable the Council to ensure that there is a close link between its work on the follow-up to Monterrey and to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, as requested in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation[8] adopted at the Summit.

2. Greater thematic unity

12. A clear message from the General Assembly working group has been the need to centre the Council's annual session around one broad theme. This has increasingly been the case in recent years, when the themes of the high-level segments, including "Information and communication technologies", "The role of the United Nations in supporting African sustainable development", "The contribution of human resources development, including in the areas of health and education, to the process of development" and "Promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development", have provided a link through several segments and across the particular themes to which those segments were devoted.

13. As stated before, such a thematic focus would enable the Council to make a more visible contribution to the integrated implementation of conferences and summits, in both policy and operational aspects. It would enable the Council to use the convening authority of the high-level segment to mobilize decision makers, the United Nations system and a range of other actors. The political momentum of the high-level segment would give strong authority to the programmatic and operational guidance of the Council, so that the Council, through its other segments, could have an impact on the work of the United Nations system and its operations.

14. As a first step in this direction, the Council decided, in 2002,[9] that the high-level and coordination segments would focus on the same cross-sectoral conference theme (or related themes), but would address it from policy development and coordination perspectives, respectively. Likewise, the operational activities segment could address the same theme or a related theme, for example, through specific panels or dialogues structured in more operational terms.

3. Predictability for greater impact

15. A key measure of the Council's performance is its capacity to have a durable impact on the work of the United Nations system at large and on the policy makers that determine the thrust of its policies and activities. This issue must be addressed if the Council is to maximize its contribution to conference implementation.

16. One way to strengthen the relevance of the guidance provided by the Council, and thus its impact, is through more intense preparations. The work of the Council should be prepared through an in-depth collaborative process involving experts and practitioners from within and outside the United Nations system. Experience and

ideas from national and regional implementation practice also have to be fed into the process. The functional commissions and regional commissions should also contribute through substantive debate and the exchange of national experience.

17. In order for the work of the Council to mobilize such preparations, it is important that there is predictability in its work. The idea has thus emerged that the Council should adopt a multi-year work programme to guide its work for the coming few years. The Council could use common conference themes as a reference for choosing the topics of its high-level, coordination and operational activities segments. These themes should take into account the Millennium Development Goals and the common conference themes identified by the Secretary-General in 1995.[10] Synchronization with the work of functional commissions and other important reviews would be useful.

18. At the same time, the timeliness of the Council's interventions and guidance is crucial if they are to have a significant impact on policy development and implementation. To that end, it is essential to maintain a degree of flexibility in the work of the Council to enable it to take up at short notice major economic or social issues requiring political attention or a coherent United Nations response. A number of mechanisms enable it to do so. The high-level segment may choose a second theme, in the event that a matter of high urgency emerges that would qualify as a theme for that segment. Likewise, the coordination segment may take up an additional theme dealing with concrete sectoral issues, as the Council did in the past with water or human settlements.[11] The Council may give further consideration to convening issue-oriented meetings that can address new and evolving issues outside the regular session.

4. Coordination segment

19. During the coordination segment, the Economic and Social Council looks at the work of the United Nations system focusing, increasingly, on a cross-cutting common conference theme. Following its agreed conclusions of 1995, the Council focused on common themes drawn from the conferences held till then. There is a need to update and develop the common themes, taking into account recent conferences, in particular, the Millennium Summit, the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In general the engagement of United Nations system organizations is considered at the high-level segment. United Nations system organizations, the specialized agencies, funds, programmes, and the regional and functional commissions need to be engaged more actively in the coordination segment and its preparation, in order for it to fulfil its function during the implementation phase of conference outcomes.[12]

20. A challenge for the future will be to mobilize more systematically the Bretton Woods institutions and WTO in the work of the segment, in view of the importance of finance and trade for the implementation of other conference goals.

21. To carry forward the momentum of the Monterrey, Johannesburg and other conferences, the Council also needs to engage non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector in the coordination segment, its preparation and follow-up. The creation of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force in 2000 is a powerful example of the kind of tools that the Council can use to maximize its impact. The role of the Council in launching similar kinds of

partnerships to implement conference goals in other areas is discussed below (see sect. C.6).

22. The Council could also invite one or several lead agencies to coordinate actions to implement its guidance given in the context of the coordination segment. To ensure a sustained impact, follow-up actions should be reported back to the Council, preferably at the coordination segment, either the following year or two years later, so as to leave more time for implementation. Alternatively, implementation could be reported back to the particular commission more directly involved with the issue.

5. Operational activities segment

23. In recent years, the operational activities segment has devoted panel discussions with United Nations country teams to a cross-cutting theme or to the theme of the high-level segment. These panel discussions could be held more systematically in the future, in order to give greater thematic unity to each session of the Council, as discussed above. In addition, other panels are organized, both at high and technical levels, on themes identified by the Council as central to the discussion on the operational activities segment. These themes could also be given special attention in the work of the boards of funds and programmes and in the reports of the boards and of the heads of funds and programmes to the Council. Likewise, they could be addressed in the dialogue with heads of funds and programmes.[13]

6. General segment

24. During the general segment, the Economic and Social Council reviews and guides the work of its functional and regional commissions, including their work on the follow-up to conferences. Coordinating the work of functional commissions and ensuring complementarity, effectiveness and efficiency of their work is one of the key tasks of the Council in the integrated follow-up to conferences. Further measures are required to improve the way the Council discharges this role at the general segment.

25. In 2002, the Economic and Social Council stressed that the outcome of the work of the functional commissions should be considered in the general segment on the basis of their reports and on the consolidated report on their work. That report should identify cross-cutting policy issues, gaps/overlaps, and areas of complementarity and cooperation. It could contribute to the integrated and coordinated follow-up to United Nations conferences and summits by focusing the analysis on the work of the functional commissions in the follow-up to and implementation of conference outcomes and on the theme chosen by the Council as the focus of its relevant session. The report could be discussed by the Council in informal consultations prior to its substantive session, in preparation of its examination of items related to the work of functional commissions.

26. The Council could also consider further measures to improve the structure of its agenda and the treatment of agenda items assigned to the general segment. Last year, the Council decided that items considered in the general segment should be streamlined, in particular by transmitting to the General Assembly items more appropriately considered by the Assembly and avoiding addressing the same issues in more than one segment, unless specifically decided.[14] Accordingly, the Council decided to examine issues related to integrated and coordinated conference follow-

up at its coordination segment, with the general segment focusing on individual conferences.

27. With regard to specific agenda items, items 7 (Coordination, programme and other questions) and 8 (Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 50/227 and 52/12 B) could be reviewed and methods identified for addressing these agenda items more effectively.

28. In addition, the Council could discuss the reports of functional commissions on drugs and crime as a distinct cluster, as compared to social development or the advancement of women.

29. The work of the general segment would benefit from increased interaction between the Council and the regional and functional commissions. This could be achieved, inter alia, through organizing panel discussions featuring the chairpersons of the regional and functional commissions during or in preparation of the general segment.

7. Specific steps required from the Economic and Social Council in the follow-up to individual conferences, within the context of an integrated approach

30. The Economic and Social Council decided to examine the implications of the outcome of the Johannesburg Summit in its future discussions on the integrated and coordinated follow-up to an implementation of major United Nations conferences and summits.[15] The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation[8] called for greater involvement of the Council in sustainable development-related work and outlined the role it could play in the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The Council, as the central mechanism for the coordination of the United Nations system and its specialized agencies and supervision of subsidiary bodies, could:

(a) Enhance its role in overseeing system-wide coordination and the balanced integration of economic, social and environmental aspects of United Nations policies and programmes aimed at promoting sustainable development;

(b) Organize periodic consideration of sustainable development themes in regard to the implementation of Agenda 21, including the means of implementation. Recommendations in regard to such themes could be made by the Commission on Sustainable Development;

(c) Make full use of its high-level, coordination, operational activities and the general segments to effectively take into account all relevant aspects of the work of the United Nations on sustainable development;

(d) Promote greater coordination, complementarity, effectiveness and efficiency of activities of its functional commissions and other subsidiary bodies that are relevant to the implementation of Agenda 21.

31. Periodic consideration of sustainable development themes by the Council should enable it to carry out the functions assigned to it by the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Recommendations for specific themes to be addressed could be made by the Commission on Sustainable Development, and/or be derived by the Council from the programme of the work of the Commission for the period after 2003. As a further means to strengthen the follow-up process of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Council could promote the implementation of the

decisions/recommendations of the Commission through the executive boards of the United Nations funds and programmes. In the same context, the outcomes of the work of United Nations Development Group in the follow-up to Johannesburg could also be brought to the attention of the Council.

32. Regarding the Monterrey Conference, the Council needs to consider how its spring meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions and WTO can best complement its policy development work and its dialogue with these institutions on the world economy during the high-level segment and with the work of the General Assembly high-level dialogue on financing for development. In future years, it would be important to ensure in-depth substantive preparations for the spring meeting through the early selection of a theme and more intensive interaction between the Council members and the executive boards of the Bretton Woods institutions and the relevant intergovernmental structure of WTO. Greater intergovernmental preparations would help identify actions to be jointly agreed at these meetings on coherence, coordination and cooperation. Multi-stakeholder groups, in coordination with the institutions concerned and other partners and stakeholders, could also make an important contribution.

33. The Council could devote a part of its regular session's high-level segment, for example one session during the policy dialogue on the first day, to addressing, in a round table or panel format, financing issues related to the theme of the high-level segment, with the participation of the finance and trade institutions and other stakeholders. The Council could also mandate the Committee on Development Policy to examine new and emerging issues related to financing for development and to submit its recommendations to its high-level segment. The Council could thus help link the finance, trade and sectoral aspects of the high-level segment theme and promote a more coherent and integrated policy response to those aspects at all levels.

34. The Council has also been invited to devote a coordination segment before 2005 to review and appraisal of the system-wide implementation of its agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system and a high-level segment before 2005 to the follow-up to the Third United Nations conference on least developed countries.

Recommendations

The Council may consider:

(a) **Deciding on the themes that it will address at its high-level and coordination segments over the coming few years, taking into account the recommendations of the General Assembly working group and the outcomes of recent major United Nations conferences;**

(b) **Addressing issues related to the theme of the high-level segment at its operational activities segment in coming years;**

(c) **Fully using its one-day policy dialogue with heads of financial and trade institutions to discuss the impact of the world economic situation on internationally agreed development goals and devote a part of the high-level segment, for example one session during the policy dialogue on the first day, to addressing in a round table or panel format, the financing issues related to the**

theme of the high-level segment, with the participation of the finance and trade institutions and other stakeholders;

(d) Inviting the United Nations System Chief Executives' Board for Coordination, boards of funds and programmes and relevant United Nations system organizations to consider, as appropriate, the theme of the high-level segment as it relates to their areas of competence, and to provide contributions to the Council's segments every year; request the Committee for Development Policy to meet early in the year; and address new and emerging issues related to financing for development and their linkages with the theme of the high-level segment and make recommendations to the Council;

(e) Preparing the work of its coordination segment through interactive debates, expert group meetings or expert forums convened, inter alia, by the regional commissions and relevant specialized agencies;

(f) Inviting one or several lead organizations to promote implementation of its guidance at the coordination segment, including a report back to the Economic and Social Council the following year or two years later at the coordination segment;

(g) Requesting that the consolidated report on the work of the functional commissions highlights policy and coordination issues emanating from the work of the functional commissions on the theme(s) addressed by the Council and invite the functional commissions to address the link between the theme(s) and their own areas of concern. In this regard, consideration needs to be given to integrating and relating the Council's theme(s) with the multi-year programme of work of functional commissions.

B. Functional commissions

35. The functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council have a primary role in the follow-up and review of the implementation of conference outcomes. The commissions, many of which attract high-level participation, have a considerable impact on policy issues in their areas of concern and help maintain the focus on such implementation. Both the General Assembly and the Council have called upon them to enhance their role as the main forums for expert follow-up and review of major United Nations conferences and summits.

36. Some commissions have undertaken a major effort to improve their working methods. For example, the World Summit on Sustainable Development gave impetus to an in-depth reflection on the changes needed in the functioning of the Commission on Sustainable Development. As a result, at its eleventh session, the Commission decided that its work would be organized as a series of two year action-oriented implementation cycles, which will include a "Review session" and a "Policy session". The former will review progress in implementing the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the five year reviews of the Conference and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In the policy year, the commission will take policy decisions on practical measures to overcome obstacles to implementation identified during the review year. To ensure a long term perspective on sustainable development, the Commission also adopted a programme of work for a number of cycles in the next decade, providing guidance

for the development of a more effective system of reporting to the Commission, and for enhancing the contributions of the United Nations system and major groups. The Commission also decided to strengthen implementation at the regional level, particularly through the regional commissions of the Organization.

37. A number of these avenues appear to be promising ways to focus the work of other functional commissions on implementation and to further enhance their effectiveness. In particular, the functional commissions should enable an interactive exchange of views and experiences, best practices and lessons learned, involving a larger number of stakeholders. In the case of some commissions, enhancing the focus on implementation might require lessening the frequency of negotiated agreed outcomes and addressing fewer themes at each session. The work of the commissions should be expanded through regional meetings, expert groups and analytical studies. It should benefit from up-to-date reports on implementation and inputs by national Governments, United Nations country teams and other actors. Such a preparatory process would bring about better linkage between global deliberations and regional and national implementation.

Recommendation

- **The Economic and Social Council could address specific recommendations to its functional commissions on how to further enhance the impact and effectiveness of their work relating to conference follow-up, taking into account the recommendations of the working group of the General Assembly.**

C. Focus on implementation

38. The integrated implementation of conferences requires a better link between policy development at the intergovernmental level (the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the functional commissions, and the executive boards of funds and programmes) and the operational work undertaken at the country level by the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions and other relevant institutions. In addition to fully using the General Assembly and inter-agency coordination mechanisms, the Council, as the main coordination body for the United Nations system, needs to play a more effective role in guiding and reviewing implementation to ensure coherence and coordination in the integrated follow-up of United Nations conferences. The Council's future work should contribute to greater policy and institutional coherence, providing clear guidance that can directly impact and sustain follow-up processes and effectively engage national constituencies.

39. The Millennium Development Goals have created new opportunities for convergence on goals and principles and coordination of action. While the Goals do not encompass all conference goals and commitments, together with the Millennium Declaration, they provide the United Nations system with a useful framework for addressing gaps, clarifying responsibilities and promoting mutually reinforcing actions among organizations of the system. Much of the work already being undertaken by the United Nations system at the country level is supportive of the conference goals and targets. The challenge lies in focusing the greater convergence of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, on priorities

in their respective country programmes, coordination strategies and partnerships, while upholding the principles of national ownership, capacity development and reduction of transaction costs, as well as the need to enhance their results-oriented focus.

1. Boards of funds and programmes: improving dialogue and oversight

40. A coherent approach to integrated conference follow-up requires that the work of the executive boards be consistent with the overall policy guidance of the General Assembly and the system-wide coordination and guidance of the Council in implementing the policies of the Assembly for integrated conference follow-up. A closer link needs to be built between the Council and the executive boards of funds and programmes to support a coherent effort to pursue the Millennium Development Goals and operationalize the policy guidance of the Assembly and the Council in the area of integrated conference follow-up.

41. The Council, in its resolution 1998/27, made specific requests to the executive boards of the United Nations funds and programmes, and to their executive heads, to report to the Council on issues related to conference follow-up, cross-sectoral coordination and the consolidated list of issues for improved coordination of operational activities.[16] However, more needs to be done in order to maximize the contribution of funds and programmes to integrated conference follow-up at the operational level.

42. So far, the majority of the reports from the United Nations funds and programmes to the Council have been more informational than analytical and the role of the Council has been limited to taking note of those reports. This is, inter alia, a function of the agendas of the executive boards, including those of their joint meetings, which are not necessarily focused on the issues upon which a policy dialogue with the Council could most effectively take place. Nor do they provide a proper basis from which the Council could provide policy guidance. In addition, there are inadequate linkages between the work of the executive boards and that of the functional commissions of the Council.

Recommendations

The Council may wish to:

(a) **Request the executive boards and the executive heads of the funds and programmes to ensure that their reports to the Economic and Social Council serve as instruments of policy dialogue with the Council, in particular on the work of funds and programmes relating to the integrated follow-up to conferences. The reports could provide an analysis of operational and implementation issues and obstacles, highlighting specific issues for the Council's consideration. These might include aspects relating to the work of the executive boards, especially in the areas that go beyond the specific mandates of each organization;**

(b) **Propose, to the same ends, more intensive consultations between the bureaus of the Economic and Social Council and the executive boards;**

(c) **Invite the United Nations funds and programmes to make better use of the consolidated list of issues to improve coordination of activities[17] as a way to seek guidance from the Council regarding integrated conference follow-up.**

2. Regional commissions: guiding and using their work on implementation and follow-up

43. The regional commissions have been given specific mandates for the follow-up to the major global conferences, and they have an important role to play in this regard. Following the completion of its review of regional commissions mandated by the General Assembly,[18] the Council, in its resolution 1998/46, provided guidance to the regional commissions for improving their contributions in the reform process of the United Nations. In the same resolution, the Council recognized the dual role of the regional commissions as outposts of the United Nations and as the regional expression of the Organization. It stressed the need to link their work more effectively with the overall activities of the Organization. The Council also invited the regional commissions to further strengthen their active participation relating to the implementation at the regional level of the results of major United Nations conferences and summits. The Council's guidance took into account (a) the convening power of the regional commissions to bring together different categories of development actors (Member States, regional and subregional organizations, NGOs and the business community); (b) their capacity to organize events at which countries can share common concerns and expectations, exchange experiences and discuss a wide range of policy issues; (c) their multisectoral nature, placing them in a good position for promoting cross-sectoral approaches; and (d) their direct contact with national statistical offices, offering a good basis for monitoring progress achieved through comparable data series and indicators.

44. Since then, the regional commissions have been strengthening their role in linking global deliberations with regional implementation measures, while continuing to support subregional and regional integration and consensus-building. The role and experience of the regional commissions have been amply demonstrated and have received recognition at recent United Nations conferences and summits. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in particular, it was emphasized that its outcome documents should be implemented at the regional level. The significance of a regional perspective in the future work of the Commission on Sustainable Development was also underlined at the Summit. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation stresses actions at the regional and subregional levels, through the regional commissions and other regional and subregional institutions and bodies, and assigns a range of functions to the regional commissions.

45. At its recent session, the Commission on Sustainable Development invited the United Nations regional commissions to contribute to its work, notably by organizing regional implementation meetings, in collaboration with its secretariat, other regional and subregional organizations and regional offices of United Nations system organizations. Those meetings are expected to contribute to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and to provide input to the Secretary-General's report for the deliberation of the Commission. They would also provide opportunities for the participation of major groups.

46. The potential contribution of the regional processes to the integrated follow-up to conferences at the global level is yet to be fully exploited. In addition to assessing the achievement of internationally agreed goals at sessions of the commissions, other formats for regional reviews would be feasible, including special events, possibly held back to back with the sessions of the commissions or of their relevant

subsidiary committees. The regional commissions could also be brought more systematically into the consultation process for determining cross-cutting themes to be addressed at the global level, in order to assess how the commissions could best provide their contributions. Synergies, complementarity and cross-fertilization should be maximized between work at the regional and global levels. The meetings of the regional commissions need to address themes of specific relevance to each region and to take into account global level concerns, common themes of conferences and regional diversity.

47. The regional commissions could also enhance their role in sharing national experiences and lessons learned among all partners, and in identifying regional priorities, perspectives and areas of concern. In particular, they could look at selected cross-cutting themes that require more regional coordination and attention. They could also pursue programmes of a cross-sectoral nature where action at the regional and subregional level would be cost-efficient and have an added value.

48. Integrated and coordinated implementation at the regional level requires more effective inter-agency cooperation and coordination. The inter-agency regional coordination meetings could provide instruments to promote cooperation and build partnerships within the United Nations system. In this regard, the Economic Commission for Africa continues to work towards greater United Nations coherence as the system's key interlocutor with African countries on the New Partnership for Africa's Development. A common regional assessment report coordinated by each regional commission (similar to the common country assessment) would also facilitate the building of a regional development framework for the United Nations agencies working at this level and could be a good platform for joint programming and common databases and knowledge networks.

49. In addition, the regional commissions could work with the United Nations funds and programmes at the national and regional levels to strengthen the operational activities through a coordinated approach. In the light of the important role of the regional commissions and other regional bodies in implementing the conference outcomes, their contribution should be reflected in the work of the functional commissions.[19]

50. The regional commissions have strategic advantages for intersectoral and multi-stakeholder dialogues at the regional level. They could further promote regional partnership with the civil society and the private sector, especially in areas where more regional cooperation and attention are required.

Recommendations

(a) **The Economic and Social Council may wish to stress the role of the regional commissions as a regional focal point for monitoring and assessing the progress made towards the achievement of these internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, bearing in mind regional priorities;**

(b) **The Council may wish to encourage regional commissions to further strengthen their capacity and profiles to fully implement the above role;**

(c) **Regional commissions should address selected commitments cutting across several United Nations conferences during their sessions at special**

events or at meetings organized back to back with their respective sessions, and report thereon to the relevant intergovernmental bodies;

(d) The Council may wish to invite the regional commissions to contribute to the theme of its high-level segment;

(e) The Council may wish to request strengthened coordination between the regional commissions and regional programmes of United Nations entities, the specialized agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions and regional development banks. This should involve the regional coordination meetings established by Council resolution 1998/46. A common regional assessment report should be prepared by each regional commission, in consultation with the regional offices of all United Nations system organizations active in each region. The assessment report would serve as a basis for a regional development framework for inter-agency cooperation at the regional and subregional levels, including joint programming, common databases and knowledge networks. In this regard, the role of the regional coordination meetings should be strengthened. Integrated follow-up to global conferences should be a recurrent item on the agendas of the regional commissions;

(f) The Council may wish to encourage greater cooperation between the regional commissions and its functional commissions, through for example, convening regional meetings on relevant issues and the adoption of regional plans of action;[20]

(g) The Council may wish to request the regional commissions to enhance their role in supporting the achievement of internationally agreed development goals through strengthening their following functions:

(i) Promoting economic, social and environmental dimensions of development in their own work;

(ii) Supporting such an integrated approach in other regional and subregional processes;

(iii) Providing for exchange of experience, best practices, case studies and partnership development;

(iv) Assisting in the mobilization of technical and financial assistance for the effective implementation of regional and subregional programmes and partnerships related to the achievement of internationally agreed goals;

(v) Further acting as regional forums for multi-stakeholder dialogues involving all relevant actors, including NGOs, academic circles and other major groups.

3. Building a closer relationship with the specialized agencies and inter-agency bodies

51. A closer link should be built between the governing boards of United Nations system organizations, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the functional commissions to promote a consistent approach on conference goals and Millennium Development Goals. To this end, thematic linkages could be built into the agendas and work programmes of those bodies. The organizations of the United Nations system also need to ensure that they have functioning programmes to

effectively support implementation of conference commitments and the Millennium Development Goals. The quantified targets of the Millennium Development Goals also need to be translated into effective systems for monitoring results.

52. To this end, closer and more systematic interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and its machinery will need to be devised to maximize mutual reinforcement to ensure that the United Nations system organizations effectively support the implementation of conference commitments through their programming frameworks. The policy guidance role of the Council should rely on the support of mechanisms such as the High-Level Committee on Programming, the United Nations Development Group and the resident coordinator system for its implementation at the global, regional and country levels.

53. The High-Level Committee on Programming has been focusing its contribution on harnessing the capacity of the United Nations system in support of the follow-up to the Millennium Declaration. It has sought to enhance its role in ongoing global and country-level monitoring processes and in the development of inter-agency strategies to maximize the system's support to countries in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The Committee gives particular attention to enhancing the system's capacity to effectively sustain country-level action and to reporting and on the need for capacity-building in data collection and analysis in developing countries. The Committee can thus play an important role in strengthening the link between what the system does at the global and country levels and the guidance provided by the Council.

54. As part of the Millennium Development Goals strategy on operational activities, the members of the United Nations Development Group are restructuring their country work to conform to the Goals as part of a results-based approach to development. The United Nations country teams, led by the resident coordinator, will support the preparation of the reports on the Goals.

55. Building on the innovative and productive modalities of cooperation that developed among agencies in the run-up to the Monterrey conference and the Johannesburg summit, the Council could serve as an effective development cooperation forum, engaging the participation of high-level policy makers from developing and developed countries, as well as other relevant interlocutors from the United Nations system and non-United Nations entities.

Recommendations

(a) **To ensure that conference goals are integrated and operationalized into the work programmes and the country level work of organizations, a closer interaction between the Economic and Social Council, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the High-Level Committee on Programming should be devised in order to ensure that organizations effectively support the implementation of conference commitments through their programming frameworks;**

(b) **The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the United Nations Development Group should continue their support to the pursuit of Millennium Development Goals and provide concrete guidance to**

their member organizations in order to intensify synergies among conference goals and facilitate an integrated approach to conference follow-up;

(c) **The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination should also be invited to contribute substantive inputs to the policy analysis regarding the common themes that the Council addresses for integrated conference follow-up.**

4. Focusing on action at the country level

56. Country-level efforts to harmonize the United Nations development system's support to integrated conference follow-up should not ignore the framework the individual institutional mandates, competencies and accumulated experiences of the organizations of the system. However, there are a number of circumstances in which the programmes, funds and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, together with the Bretton Woods institutions and other institutional actors should and do adopt a coordinated approach in supporting national efforts towards the achievement of conference goals and targets at the country level.

57. In its agreed conclusions 2000/2, the Economic and Social Council encouraged further progress to integrate conference outcome implementation into country assistance programmes. It reaffirmed that the resident coordinator system has an important role to play in assisting Governments and enhancing United Nations system coordination, including through the establishment of thematic groups on cross-cutting conference themes and the full utilization of collaborative programming frameworks, in particular the common country assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, to support, at the request of Governments, the development of national strategies and action plans for integrated and coordinated conference follow-up.[21]

58. The support given by United Nations country teams to conference implementation at national levels has become more coordinated and integrated than in the past. Good practices can be found in theme group activities, such as joint analysis and assessment of a country's progress in achieving conference goals; thematic assessment as a basis for policy dialogue with the Government and other national partners; and area-based integrated/joint programmes on cross-cutting issues such as poverty eradication. Theme groups have proven to be key vehicles for country-level coordination, in particular when there is a direct involvement of all development partners, including national Governments, the World Bank, civil society and bilateral donors. However, some concerns have been raised about the proliferation of thematic groups in some countries, which increases the time spent on coordination rather than on programme activities.[22]

59. With regard to national reporting on conference follow-up, the Council may wish to reiterate that the organizations of the United Nations system are encouraged to continue and deepen their efforts to avoid duplicative requests for national reports and to share with one another information obtained through national reports, thereby limiting information requested from Governments; and that the relevant secretariats prepare, in a collaborative manner, harmonized and simplified formats that may be used by Governments in preparing information on a single subject or a cluster of subjects.[23] The country reports on the Millennium Development Goals prepared with national leadership and ownership are an important element in this regard.

Recommendations

The Council may wish to:

(a) **Invite all funds, programmes and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system to continue their efforts to pursue an integrated approach in conference follow-up at the country level, ensuring that common country assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, as well as similar frameworks, including poverty reduction strategy papers where relevant, designed to coordinate operational activities are formulated as mechanisms geared to a more intensified integration of conference outcomes;**

(b) **Reiterate that United Nations system organizations are encouraged to renew their efforts to avoid duplicative requests for national reports and to support the country reports on the Millennium Development Goals for that purpose.**

5. Strengthening the relationship with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization[24]

60. A particular effort will need to be made to make more effective use of the mechanisms for cooperation with financial and trade institutions, as envisaged in both General Assembly resolution 50/227 and the Monterrey Consensus adopted at the International Conference on Financing for Development.

61. Useful forums should be provided to business interlocutors and civil society representatives in preparing for: the Economic and Social Council spring meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions; the General Assembly high-level dialogue; and meetings with the multi-stakeholders of the Commission on Sustainable Development. Outcomes of these forums should focus on civil society's contribution to the implementation of conference outcomes and ideas/suggestions on how the Council can help.

Recommendation

- **The Economic and Social Council could have a more intensive interaction with intergovernmental counterparts in the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization in preparation for the Council's spring meeting with them in order to develop shared approaches and a common understanding on policies and actions in the implementation of conference outcomes and to focus attention on results, leading to action-oriented discussions and outcome at the meeting.**

6. Creating partnerships and alliances with all stakeholders

62. Institutional stakeholders, advocacy and interest groups, business and other major groups as well as research and academic institutions inject dynamism to the intergovernmental process. Their presence brings media attention and promotes realization of the organization's "We the peoples" character. Monterrey, Johannesburg and other United Nations conferences and summits have been vital sources of innovative arrangements to enhance partnership and alliance-building with non-state actors. Non-state actors need to be integrated into the follow-up mechanism to ensure effective partnership with Governments and international

organizations in the implementation phase. The innovative modalities of cooperation established in the preparation of Johannesburg and Monterrey must be built upon in the follow-up phase.

63. While respecting the essential intergovernmental and multilateral character of the Organization, the deliberative processes can facilitate the building of alliances for action around key goals and commitments, modelled along the lines of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force. Meetings should be seen more as events culminating an intense preparatory process leading to the launching of actions by Governments and partners.

64. Arrangements need to be devised to ensure that the partnerships launched during the World Summit on Sustainable Development serve to advance in a concrete and sustained way the follow-up to Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. The Commission on Sustainable Development is working on the follow-up to the partnerships launched at the Summit, including sharing lessons learned, progress made and best practices. The partnerships keep the Commission informed about their activities and progress in achieving their targets.

65. A consistent effort must be made by the United Nations system to engage all relevant stakeholders in the countries, using to the best the comparative advantage of each. Diverse participation should be encouraged, especially from developing countries, and the involvement of NGOs should be increased, including through regional/national networks. The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination could also help promote enhanced collaboration with the private sector, NGOs and other parts of civil society. New ideas may emerge from the panel of eminent persons established by the Secretary-General.

Recommendations

(a) **The Economic and Social Council could hold forums with a broad range of development partners on issues related to implementation in a specific area in order to launch and sustain new partnership initiatives and alliances;**

(b) **The Economic and Social Council could encourage diverse participation, especially from developing countries, and the involvement of NGOs in the integrated and coordinated implementation of conference outcomes, including through regional/national networks.**

Notes

[1] See General Assembly resolution 57/270.

[2] General Assembly resolution 50/227, annex I, paras. 36 and 57.

[3] See General Assembly resolution 57/144, para. 7.

[4] Resolution 2001/21.

[5] See agreed conclusions 2002/1, para. 4.

[6] General Assembly resolution 45/264, annex, para. 5 (d) (i).

[7] *Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.II.A.7).

[8] *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

[9] Agreed conclusions 2002/1, para. 6.

[10] E/1995/86, para. 57.

[11] General Assembly resolution 50/227.

[12] The new link with the theme of the high-level segment should help to mobilize the system, as should the decision to choose a theme "including on new and emerging issues, which will add value to international efforts to achieving internationally agreed development goals" (see agreed conclusions 2002/1).

[13] According to agreed conclusions 2002/1, the dialogue "should be on thematic and coordination issues related to operational activities on options and measures aimed at improving coordination and improving the performance of funds and programmes in the implementation of [conference outcomes]" (para. 18).

[14] Agreed conclusions 2002/1, para. 20.

[15] Agreed conclusions 2002/1, para. 8.

[16] Resolution 1998/27, paras. 1, 2 and 4.

[17] Ibid., para. 4.

[18] General Assembly resolution 50/227.

[19] Resolution 1998/46, para. 41.

[20] Resolution 1998/46, annex III, para. 16.

[21] Agreed conclusions 2000/2, para. 20.

[22] E/2002/47, para. 35.

[23] Agreed conclusions 2000/2, para. 13.

[24] This subject is addressed in the reports presented to the operational activities and general segments.